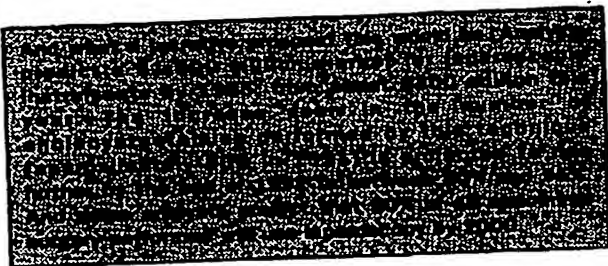


COMPANIES

Can Ethicon gain in USS?

New product launches for minimally invasive surgery have intensified the contest between the two big names in this rapidly expanding market. US Surgical currently claims more than an 80% market share, compared with about 10% for Ethicon, but the Johnson & Johnson subsidiary is ready for battle and, according to a US press report, aims to increase its share to 50% by the end of 1995.



Ethicon revealed 30 new products at the American College of Surgeon's annual meeting last month. The Endopath stapler device for hernia repair was pushed as the major introduction, with features including disposability, multi-firing capabilities and articulation properties. Another device to enter the market was the Ligacip endoscopic rotating multi-clip applier and a number of special catheters for cholecystectomy procedures.

US Surgical was not to be upstaged however, and had several new product launches of its own to try to snatch the limelight. One of these matched Ethicon's Endopath, as it also was a stapler device for hernia repair. Similarly to Endopath, US Surgical's Endo-Hernia is disposable, has an articulating head, and has multi-firing capabilities for between 10 and 50 staples. However, this product requires less frequent reloading than the Endopath.

US Surgical's other major promotion at the ACS meeting consisted of second-generation ancillary devices for general and thoracic surgery. These included what the company believes to be a world first - a range of rotating, flexible-headed graspers, scissors and dissectors. These instruments allow surgeons to move around curves of up to 90°. Miniature surgical staplers that staple, cut and reconnect tissue up to 5.7 cm long were also featured at the meeting. US Surgical claimed that these could make minimally invasive bowel surgery, advanced lung surgery and hysterectomies a clinical reality.

Other ventures embarked upon by US Surgical include the recent signing of a deal with Sterile Concepts to have its laparoscopic instruments put into the company's custom trays. It is also continuing its efforts in the field of surgeon training and, according to chairman Leon C Hirsch, has instructed 35,000 surgeons worldwide to date.

■ A recently patented invention could be applied to micro-instruments for surgery in the future, a UK press report notes. Developed by Prof Johannes Smits of Boston University, the invention is currently in the form of a robotic ant. The revolutionary step of the microscopic machinery is that it features a gearless motor which exploits thin films of piezoelectric materials capable of converting electrical voltage into mechanical movement and vice versa. The 4 mm "ant" is now being built by Prof Smits' team at the Electrical, Computer and Systems Engineering department of the University.

Valley Forge's new bipolar ducts

Valley Forge Scientific Corporation has launched a high-power bipolar electrosurgical cutting and coagulation system targeted at the neurosurgical market. Dr Jerry Malis, the company's president, told Clinica that the new unit totally replaces the monopolar system: not only does it no longer require any grounding, but it has the capacity to work under liquid.

In addition, Valley Forge has introduced the Malis Disposable Bipolar Cord and Irrigation Tubing Set. This is a bipolar forceps cord combined with an irrigation tubing set that delivers electrical current and irrigation fluid simultaneously to a surgical hand-held instrument. Codman & Shurtleff, a division of Johnson & Johnson, will sell the device to the US and international neurosurgical markets. Valley Forge is negotiating with international distributors and manufacturers to sell the device in the general and laparoscopic surgery markets.

US company news in brief

□ Durr-Fillauer to sell subsidiary?

Durr-Fillauer Medical Inc, which is based in Montgomery, Alabama, is considering the possible sale of its wholly owned orthopaedic subsidiary, one of the largest US manufacturers and distributors of orthotic and prosthetic devices. The subsidiary reported revenues of \$6 million and operating income of \$700,000 for the six months ended June 30th, 1991.

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